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ABSTRACT

Failure to establish an adequate identity during adolescence may lead to role confusion, where the individual experiences uncertainty and anxiety, and overly relies on others for guidance and support. It can be argued that identity achievers, by going through a crisis and becoming committed to a career, have gone through the process of separating from their family in order to make their own decision, and are thus better able than individuals in other statuses to reconnect with parents in a more mature way. In this study interview data were examined to determine the relationship between identity development (i.e., identity achievement, identity non-achievement) and relationship maturity with parents. Unmarried individuals (N=53) who participated in a larger longitudinal study examining family relationships in young adults were given Marcia's Ego Identity Interview and the Family Relationship Interview. Individuals' identity statuses were determined as well as levels of relationship maturity with parents. A one-way analysis of variance indicated that identity achieved individuals had higher relationship maturity with their mothers than did the non-achieved individuals. A relationship between identity status and relationship maturity with fathers was not found. It could be that in today's society the maternal relationship is more important than the paternal relationship, especially when it involves issues of separation. (ABL)

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Identity Status and Relationships with Parents

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Abstract

Interview data were examined to determine the relationship between identity development (i.e., identity achievement, identity non-achievement) and relationship maturity with parents. Fifty-three unmarried individuals, who participated in a larger longitudinal study examining family relationships in young adults were given: 1) Marcia's Ego Identity Interview; and 2) Family Relationship Interview. Individuals' identity statuses were determined as well as levels of relationship maturity with parents. A one-way analysis of variance indicated that identity achieved individuals had higher relationship maturity with their mothers than the identity non-achieved individuals.

According to Erikson (1968), failure to establish an adequate identity during adolescence may lead to role confusion, where the individual experiences uncertainty and anxiety, and overly relies on others for guidance and support. Marcia (1966), using the criteria of crisis and commitment to operationalize Erikson's theory, identified four identity statuses-- achievement, diffusion, moratorium and foreclosure. The purpose of this study was to examine identity status in young adults in relation to their relationships with parents.

Considering Marcia's (1966) identity statuses in connection to relationship maturity (White, Speisman & Costos, 1983), it can be argued that identity achievers, by going through a crisis and becoming committed to a career, have gone through the process of separating from their family in order to make their own decision, and are thus better able than individuals in the other statuses to reconnect with parents in a more mature way. Therefore, it was hypothesized that identity achievers would have higher relationship maturity with their parents than individuals in the other statuses.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 53 unmarried individuals, ranging in age

from 22 to 26, who were part of a larger sample of over 360 subjects participating in a longitudinal study of family relationships in young adults (White et al., 1983).

Measures

1) Marcia's Ego Identity Interview is a semi-structured interview dealing with occupational intentions. Responses to the open-ended interview are used to classify subjects into four identity statuses, based on whether they have met the criteria of going through a crisis (i.e., decision making period) and have made some type of occupational commitment. The four statuses are: 1) Identity diffusion- no crisis, no commitment; 2) Identity foreclosure- no crisis, commitment; 3) Identity moratorium- in crisis at present, no commitment; and 4) Identity achievement- crisis, commitment.

2) The Family Relationship Interview is a semistructured interview that deals with the young adult's relationship with parents (White et al., 1983). Responses to the open-ended interview questions are used to categorize the individuals into six stages which fall into three levels of relationship maturity: 1) Self-focused individuals are still mainly tied up with their own needs, and thus not able to see their parents' perspective; 2) Role-focused individuals relate to parents in ways that are dominated by conformity and conventionality; and 3) Individuated-connected individuals are both highly individuated themselves and also able to connect with

parents in intimate, reciprocal, mutual bonds.

Results

In order to test the hypothesis that identity achievers would have higher relationship maturity than individuals in the other three statuses, the moratorium, foreclosed and diffuse individuals were grouped together and were compared with the identity achievers. A one-way analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in relationship maturity between the two groups, with the identity achieved individuals having higher relationship maturity scores ($F=4.12$, $d.f.=1,51$, $p<.05$). These results held only for relationship maturity with mother.

(See Table 1 for Descriptive Statistics)

Discussion

This study revealed a link between identity development in young adulthood and relationships with parents. Specifically, the results support the hypothesis that identity achievers have higher relationship maturity scores with their mothers when compared with the other statuses. The identity achievers, on average, scored at the transition between stage 2 and stage 3 of the self-focused level, whereas the non-achievers had an average score at stage 2 of the self-focused level.

Young adults scoring at stage 2 of the self-focused level are still

caught up with emphasizing separateness from parents. These individuals have a difficult time seeing their parents as people or describing them in ways other than as merged with or oppositional to themselves (White, Speisman and Costos, 1984). At the transition point between self-focused and role-focused, however, the young adult is actively trying to understand the parent more, "At the 2-3 transition, the movement appears to be from a self-focused approach to the parent to a calmer, more conventional adult-like approach," (White, Speisman and Costos, 1984, p.16).

The diffuse, foreclosed and moratorium individuals as a group, have not yet achieved individuation; thus, they may be more preoccupied with their own autonomy and identity and thus less able to have a more mature relationship with their parents, specifically in this study with their mothers. The diffuse individuals are not yet interested in achieving an identity, and are not taking any steps to assume one. It is not surprising that these individuals do not have a mature relationship with their parents. The foreclosed individuals had not gone through a decision making process in order to make a commitment. Many of these individuals chose careers based on their parents' decisions. They may not have separated from their parents and as a result have not developed their own identity. This could interfere with their achieving higher relationship maturity with their parents. Moratorium individuals are presently in a crisis. They

are preoccupied with finding an identity and separating from parents; thus, they have difficulty thinking of their parents as individuals in their own right. Identity achievers, on the other hand, have gone through a crisis period where they have made their own decisions. In so doing, they have separated from parents and have attained their own identity. Now it is possible for them to move toward a more mutual relationship with their parents.

An interesting finding, which was not expected, was the lack of a relationship between identity status and relationship maturity with the fathers. It could be that in our society the maternal relationship is more important, especially when it involves issues of separation. These young adults grew up at a time when the majority of their mothers were full-time mothers, and their fathers were not in the home as much due to their working full-time outside the home. In the present and future, children of the 1980's and 1990's will be experiencing a different home environment than the once popular traditional nuclear family. With the advent of an ever increasing number of single family homes, and the need for two working parents outside the home these issues of individuation and separation will undoubtedly become more complex.

Table 1

Relationship Maturity Scores as a Function Of Identity Status

	N	Mean	Min	Max
Group 1 Identity				
Non-achieved	26	3.04 (Stage 2)	1	5
Group 2 Identity Achieved	27	3.71 (Stage 2-3 Transition)	1	6

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